

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Mark Van Doren, Padraic Colum, David
Morton, Marguerite Wilkinson, Therese Lindsey,
Katherine Anne Porter and Others. — — — —

Robert Frost and D. H. Lawrence Reviewed. — —

\$2.50 by the Year — — — — — Single Copies 25c

Published Monthly at 449 West 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Number 35 — — — — — January, 1924

Entered as second-class matter February 28, 1921, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1876

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River Snow

THE flakes are a little thinner where I look,
For I can see a circle of grey shore,
And greyer water, motionless beyond.
But the other shore is gone, and right and left
Earth and sky desert me. Still I stand
And look at the dark circle that is there—
As if I were a man blinded with whiteness,
And one grey spot remained. The flakes descend,
Softly, without a sound that I can tell—
When out of the further white a gull appears,
Crosses the hollow place, and goes again
There was no flap of wing; no feather fell.
But now I hear him crying, far away,
And think he may be wanting to return
The flakes descend. And shall I see the bird?
Not one path is open through the snow.

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Rain-Crow

I WALKED the woods to find it, but no bird
That fled me as I wandered was the one.
There, always in the distance, poured the slow,
Pure, melancholy song, and though I turned
I never could be nearer; till the woods
Grew silent a long time, and I went on
And entered a cool chamber that the trees
Hung dark and close above. It was a room
With a clean floor, and the walls tapered up
Until I thought I stood in an old bell,
Grey-ribbed and mossy green, that had not rung
For centuries, and would not ring again
Then suddenly it sounded. A deep note
From some high hidden corner floated down,
Falling upon my ears; and soon the place
Flowed full of the sad music I had sought.
I waited, with my eyes upon the ground.
I could not lift them up to see a bird.

Pigeon

THIS bird is used to sitting on bright ledges
And looking into darkness. Through the square
High window of the barn the mow is black
To one here by the fence. But there he sits
And treads the sun-warm sill, turning his breast
Toward all the musty corners deep within.
They flash no colors on him, though the sky
Is playing bronze and green upon his back.
Gravely he disappears, and spiders now
Must hurry from the rafters where his beak
Searches the seed The afternoon is slow
Till he returns, complacent on the ledge,
And spreads a breast of copper. On the ground
A grain of corn is yellower than gold.
He circles down and takes it, leisurely.

—Mark Van Doren

Plovers

MY thoughts are like the plovers' flight:
Unguided, nestless, without bourn,
Wandering and impetuous,
Turning and flying to return.
My thoughts are like the plovers' flight:
They have the oceans for their reaches;
These wild birds seen on Ireland's ground
I name upon Hawaiian beaches:
Estrayents they on all lands' ends.

—*Padraic Colum*

Penitent

THOUGH she be flint and jasper in the day
Now is she melted;
Here as she droops within your door
In satin belted;
With moonlight slippers on the floor
Her small feet felted.

Now crumbling all that proud young icy heart,
Tortured and turning;
Lost in a sigh that crystal voice
Keen-edged for spurning;
That faltering uneasy breast
In embers burning.

Pity her then, nor smile that secret smile
Of subtle scorning;
Your easy love knows not her Calvary
Of passionate thorning.
There shall yet midnight gloom your sky
When hers is morning.

—*Christine Turner Curtis*

Onlookers

BROWN leaves are dark with wisdom,
And secrets understood;
They know the dual goodness
And evil in the wood.

The yellow, light sun-drinkers,
Are pallid as champagne—
"The dance, the dance is over;
Drink, then, the autumn rain!"

The red burn bright through loving,
The red glow unafraid;
Against the heart of summer
Was beauty made.

But green leaves in November
Are pitiable and strange:
They have looked on glory,
Yet know no change.

—*May Lewis*

The Choice

WHERE there are hazel wands and willows,
Where there are dogwood boughs,
Where there is golden-rod and briar,
Where there is widest sky—
Though there be only roots for pillows—
The solitary lie;
Though there be only stone for fire,
The single come to house.

In December

How beautiful to see,
These three red apples on a gold-leaved tree.

The bitter smoke of burning drifts away
From the black ground where all the gold leaves lay.

There's nothing left of autumn to remember,
Save these, hanging so high above December.

Look up, now, through the cold clear air and see
These apples high upon a gold-leaved tree.

—*Elisabeth Thomas*

Scars

THE smell of ruin in the autumn air,
When rusty twilights come too early down,
Will take the hearts of strong men unaware,
And lure them from the friendly, lighted town,—
To walk old, lonely roadways where they learn
Again of summers that have come to husk,
Where smoky stars like low-hung lanterns burn
Above the crumbling borders of the dusk.

On littered ways where leaves are crisp and curled,
And mist comes in between the passing shapes,
There go the lone and desolate of the world,
Wrapped in their thoughtful silences like capes,
Walking dark roads beneath the autumn stars,
Each with his hidden and historic scars.

—*David Morton*

The Teacher

IF I have not dreams, I must make them
For youth looks into my eyes,—
Youth with its dower of visions.
What right have I to face it
Unless I bear dreams in my hands?
If dreams I have lost, I must find them,
In curve of a petal or cloud,
In gold of the future or past.
If I have not dreams I must make them
For youth looks into my eyes.

—*Mary Armantine Ward*

To the Younger Set

WHEN you are old
And have, perhaps, the time for pitying,
Think of us, then,
And our too stormy and too tragic spring . . .
You'll have forgotten us; we shall be dead;
Yet it was we
Whose bodies made the bridge for you to tread.

You do not fear:
You ride abroad with neither pain nor ruth,
But we,
We fettered, we held dumb,
We too were Youth—
With our unlearned and close chained hands we lit the spark
In terror. Nay, we were not brave, as you . . .
You have no fear—but now the light has come.

You are most brave,
But yet your light—it was the light we gave.

Think of us, then,
Whose bodies made the bridge for you to tread,
When you are kind and old—and we are dead.

—*Margaret Widdemer*

Two Songs From Mexico

I

IN TEPOZOTLAN

I SHOULD like to see again
That honey-colored girl
Dipping her arms shoulder-deep
In the hives of honey.
Who can tell me where she is gone,
That untroubled innocent
Whose hands were kissed by bees,
And whose fingers dripped honey?

II

FIESTA DE SANTIAGO

He moves in the subtle trance
Of a wild delicate dance.
Masked in a smile of death
He lifts his hand
In a gesture scrawled upon tombs.
The odour of silence
Is in his breath.
He turns his head
With the fatal repose
Of the indifferent dead.

—*Katherine Anne Porter*

Pater

I LOVE these things that he draws out
 (Prose painter richly circumspect)
Of what is darkly round about
And iridescently direct.

Using the falls of light that flow
Through prisms to enchant the whole:
Escaping from sound's undertow
With solemn thought and singing soul.

—*Kenneth Slade Alling*

A Cottage in the Catskills

WHERE high above the world the wind's a song
And wisely Rip Van Winkle felt the thrill,
And clouds are vagrants' canopies of silk,
 I, too, escape from life upon this hill.
Below, where trees adorn the dimpled earth,
 A gable hides, as silent as a star;
A cowbell lulls the air with mellow notes:
 "O, valley, rest in peace, the towns are far."

The pines lay down their needle-woven rugs
 In aisles cathedral-windowed through the trees
And dryads leave their prints in hollows soft
 From having worshipped beauty on their knees;
The thrush their temple bell is, love-inspired,
 A chiming walled in leaves and rippling sweet,
The forest incense steals across the dusk,
 And roads are copper ribbons for the feet . . .

And for the spirit unseen roads will run
Beyond the rising moon and setting sun.

Sea Gulls

MY ship is long upon a lonely sea
Where no sails pass to windward or to lee,
And far am I from a bird's song or nest
And dawns that shake the tree-tops from their rest—
Yet sea-gulls come to meet me in the mists
As warrant that a land somewhere exists.
Hour after hour, easily and still,
They follow, unfatigued, the ship's slow will,
A silence of white wings in windless space,
To float and with the sunbeams interlace,
Weaving curves of grace against the glare,
Like threads of silk embroidered on the air . . .
And then to watch them fall, for hunger's sake,
Disputing in the ship's uneven wake—
Must I accept this law of ugliness
With the white bird made for the air's caress,
Whose beauty is enough when on the wing
To make my mind forget, my heart to sing?

—*Charles Divine*

A Proud Song

THE saints who love the Crucified
Are humble, for their wealth is great;
They may go royally arrayed
With color of their high estate.

But I, who am no saint at all,
And poor in every priceless thing,
Put on a draggled coat of pride
That I may face the world and sing.

Oh, I would gladly lay it by
As cumbersome and ill to bear,
But Father, pity poverty—
I have no other coat to wear.

—*Marguerite Wilkinson*

Lost

A TRAVELER drew rein where stood
A little gallowsed lad
With mountain wildness in blue eyes
Old-young and strangely sad.

"Say, boy, have you-all seen a bunch
Of stray horse pass this way?
Two white-faced horses, one all white,
A roan and a crippled bay?"

He swung his leg about the horn
And dropped his bridle-rein
And hungrily his spent horse crunched
The scant grass of the lane.

The boy looked toward the wooded hills
Where distant lime-rocks showed
And, dimly in and out the brush,
Faint glimpses of a road.

"I seen 'um, yes—" (he gulped a cry)
"But when ye git up there
And look down from them big white rocks,
And look round everywhere—

"The horses—yes—they wint that way—"
(What effort each word cost)
"But whin ye git to them big rocks,
Why then—————you're LOST!"

—*Therese Lindsey*

The Measure & A Journal of Poetry

Published monthly by the Editors at 449 West 22nd Street, New York

Edited by Kenneth Slade Alling, Joseph Auslander, Padraic Colum, Carolyn Hall, Louise Townsend Nicholl, George O'Neil, Pitts Sanborn, Genevieve Taggard, Winifred Welles. From these nine an acting editor and an assistant are elected quarterly by the board. Associate Editors—Hervey Allen, Maxwell Anderson, and Frank Ernest Hill.

Subscription Manager—Frances C. L. Robbins.

ACTING EDITOR: CAROLYN HALL

Robert Frost's New Book

New Hampshire, a Poem with Notes and Grace Notes, by Robert Frost. Henry Holt & Co., New York.

MORE than any other poet in America Robert Frost is a poet of the soil; what he writes about, whether trees or men and women, have their roots in the soil of New England. And yet as I read *New Hampshire*, I perceive that Robert Frost is not the poet of a settled community as was Robert Burns. Often a whim seizes on him, and all that he has looked upon may be forsaken.—

I stay;
But it isn't as if
There wasn't always Hudson's Bay
And the fur trade,
A small skiff
And a paddle blade.

or.—

So at a knock
I emptied my cage
To hide in a world
And alter with age.

These recurrent whims, these jumps towards new beginnings, show that he is genuinely of a community that had pioneers for fathers.

Robert Frost is really more the poet of the pioneer than the poets who sang the pioneers. He is the pioneer who has come back to the land that has the legend of his people.

The land is still the pioneer's land—bare, without any romantic beauty. He is able to see it all with that intensity of vision that makes for the creation of beauty. To the stone walls of New Hampshire and Vermont he gives such romance that we too must go "measuring stone walls, perch on perch"; he makes the helve of the pioneer's axe take on an appearance that will be always its appearance for us now.—

And stood the axe there on its horse's hoof,
Erect, but not without its waves, as when
The snake stood up for evil in the garden.

This axe-helve that he makes a poem about is no bad analogy for Robert Frost's poetry. A poem of his seems like a natural object just made free of certain encumbrances that obscured a grace that we should all be able to recognize.—

He showed me that the lines of a good helve
Were native to the grain before the knife
Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves
Put on it from without.

He makes the grindstone under the apple tree memorable; in "The Census Taker" he makes an empty house take on the significance of a living thing that has lost animation, and in "The Witch of Coos" he makes an old house so grim and so enigmatic that we become haunted by it.

Robert Frost brought into poetry a kind of featureless blank verse that was admirably adapted for putting before us the earth that he knew and the people who belonged to it. In his new collection of poems there are signs that he is wearing through this medium of his. The bulk of the poems are in the kind of blank verse that he has made his own. But this verse is not used now to give the tragic readings of life that he gave in "Home Burial" and "The Self Seeker." What he gives mostly is the idyll—the idyll that has some underlying humour like "The Star Splitter," "The Axe Helve," "Paul's Wife," "Maple," "Wild Grapes," "Two Witches," and the one with the very odd title "A Fountain, A Bottle, A Donkey's Ears and Some Books." "The Census Taker," and "Place for Third," have some-

thing of the mood of the poems in *North of Boston*, but even these two are more idyllic than tragic. The poem that gives title to the book is humorously discursive,—a blank verse satiric poem with rhymes coming in like puns in a racy monologue.

Any poet who would attempt to use Frost's medium or try to deal with his subjects without first having Frost's intensity would soon come to disaster. The stones he assembles are flints, and he has the iron that brings fire out of them. There are few today who could get so much intensity into a poem as Frost gets into these few lines.—

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

A sense of form underlies everything he writes, even that which seem to be most discursive. This sense of form is shown most exquisitely in the poem beginning.—

Others taunt me with having knelt at well-heads.

It is a poem in hendecasyllabics, a form that seems impossible to bring into English. Tennyson, when he used it lightly, spoke of himself as "Like a skater on ice that hardly bears him." Robert Frost uses the form triumphantly, and through it he gives the sense of something at once familiar and lonely that comes to us at wells. I wish I had space to quote the whole of this beautiful and unprecedented poem. I admire immensely Robert Frost's narrative poems, but I could wish he would turn from them for a while and give us a book of such lyrics as "Fire and Ice," "Nothing Gold Can Stay," "For Once Then Something."

—*Padraic Colum*

Lawrence Into Wolf

Birds, Beasts and Flowers! by D. H. Lawrence. Thomas Seltzer, New York.

MR. LAWRENCE has reached the saturation point. Thin form has dissolved in the juices of too-exquisite perceptions, of compulsive repetition, seeping through. Rationalization walls are being soaked down in the slow and tortured flood of neurotic reasons. Lawrence, the genius, is doing away with Lawrence, the artist.

This book is the contemporary Lawrence complete, and would serve as summary of the period, perhaps of all the periods, in his development or disintegration, whichever. Nowhere else has he laid himself so open, expressed himself so successfully. Here is the somewhat incomprehensible Dark God of *Kangaroo*; and here is the fear and hatred of women which have finally shot him straight out from the wheel on that tangent toward man-worship, the following of a master-mind, which *Women in Love* indicated and *Aaron's Rod* and *Kangaroo* took far enough. This system of masters and gods is comparable, I think, to certain theosophic systems. Are all systems tangents and defences? And here, too, are the ranting propagandism for uncertain objects, the tortured analogies, of the *Studies in Classic American Literature*, probably the most singular, certainly the most single-minded, book of criticism in the world. And finally, next-to-the-last poem, is the most beautiful and open treatment of the motif of his next-to-the-first book, *Sons and Lovers*, which has ever been written, excepting not even *Hamlet*. Perhaps Lawrence has never done a truer and gentler thing than this poem of his great love for his mother. A love made no less beautiful by the bitterness it gathered in its wake, the distortion it brought about. If only he could have kept his right hand from writing the last paragraph to a poem written otherwise wholly by his left! That paragraph makes me think of the little tails of she-goats he writes about, "like a lifted hand, hailing at her wrong end."

It is these very fears, unsatisfactions, and defences which have kept him what he pre-eminently is above all other contemporary artists—a tortured seeker after ultimate satisfaction in description and expression, an agonized getter-at of essence. Over and over go the convolutions of word and phrase, deeper in and deeper in. In

the major part of this book he has taken for his handling flowers and fruits and birds and animals, things alive but not human, things either actually or imaginably sexed. Never has he so sung out the bitter burden of his heart—his males are all frightened, ultimately baffled, made a little ridiculous; his females all aware, slightly venomous, finally inaccessible. And never has he been more satisfying in his delving and bringing forth. The portions which do not rant and in which the writer is lost in his beloved of the moment—be it bare almond-tree or Sicilian cyclamen or bat “blind with frenzy, with cluttered fear,” clinging “like a blot with his breast to the wall,” “dropping about the air getting tired,” or goat, “the whorls of bone and of horn slowly revolving towards unexplored explosion”—are truly magnificent, greatly done. These are the parts in which art, battered but not yet broken through by genius, miraculously finds the thing itself and recreates it.

He is still struggling with America. In the few poems written in New Mexico which are the poetic residue of his American literature book, there is much talk of a new dawn, of West, and a strange tentative identification of the “Amerindian” as he Austinly calls him, with the “Dark God.” Here is something of a jumble, yet to be worked through. He gets the turkey-cock, but not America. He tells luminously, gloriously, about the cock and about the Indians—but he is unsatisfied, does not quite know. The picture he draws of himself, a small red wolf

That has followed the sun from the dawn through the east
Trotting east and east and east till the sun himself went home,

standing homeless and perplexed and friendly at the edge of the circle of shadow about the Indians’ fire, is true, is right. It would seem as though in America he had found not America itself perhaps, but himself, and some peace. There is a peace, a quietness, in the mother poem, “Spirits Summoned West” not usual. It was the old Indian who called him red wolf—and he who discovers one’s self must always be, at least temporarily, a god. If this were Lawrence’s last book, it would leave him one of the great neurotic artists of all time, puzzled and peaceful only for the moment on the edge of shadow—the avid small red wolf among writers, trotting, seeking, watching, running away, and toward.

—*Louise Townsend Nicholl*

South Carolina's Third Year Book

The third Year Book of the Poetry Society of South Carolina has made its prosperous appearance together with John Crowe Ransom's poem, "Armageddon" which won the Southern Prize this year and which the Society has printed in bibelot. Whereas three years ago South Carolina was the pioneer of the south in the poetry movement, now there are poetry societies and fires of enthusiasm in Texas, Maryland, Georgia and Virginia. The Poetry Society of South Carolina has accomplished much in its three years. It offers eight prizes yearly amounting to a total of \$450 which is certainly an unusually substantial material recognition of poets' labors. Any poet interested in these prizes can learn all about them through The Secretary of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, Charleston, S. C.

—*Carolyn Hall*

CONTRIBUTORS

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE EDITORS

at

449 West 22nd Street, New York City

Subscription \$2.50 a year

Single copies 25 cents

WHERE THE MEASURE IS ON SALE

Brentano's Fifth Avenue and 27th Street, New York City
The Village Bookshop..... 4 Christopher Street, New York City
The Washington Square Bookshop..... 27 West 8th Street, New York City
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